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ABSTRACT

A program was developed and implemented to improve fourth graders' writing skills in conjunction with the State Writing Assessment Test. The objectives for the program were for 80% of the students to improve their writing scores by a minimum of 0.5 point using the State Writing rubric as the guideline; to increase students' understanding of the Narrative and Expository forms of writing by 80%; and to increase the typing and keyboarding ability of the students by 20%. The target group of 25 students in a mid-sized elementary school in a large, culturally diverse metropolitan area was immersed in a Writer's Workshop and participated in a plethora of developmental writing activities, including word processing and a keyboarding skills program. All program objectives were met, with the target group improving in all areas. (Contains 18 references. Appendixes present data, various work sheets, activities, and samples of students' writing.) (Author/RS)

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DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS OF FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS USING A VARIETY OF INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

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by

Nancy B. Priest

A Practicum Report

Submitted to the Faculty of the Abraham Fischler Center for the Advancement of Education of Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

The abstract of this report may be placed in a National Database System for reference.

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Abstract

Developing Writing Skills of Fourth Grade Students Using a variety of intervention Strategies.
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Descriptors: Elementary Education/Creative Writing/ Writing Process/State Writing Assessment Test/Word Processing/Fourth Grade/Keyboarding Skills/Computers as Motivators/At-Risk Students.

This program was developed and implemented to improve fourth grade writing skills in conjunction with the State Writing Assessment Test. The objectives for this program were for 80% of the students to improve their writing scores by a minimum of 0.5 point using the State Writing rubric as the guideline; to increase students' understanding of the Narrative and Expository forms of writing by 80%; and to increase the typing and keyboarding ability of the students by 20%. The target group was immersed in a Writer's Workshop and participated in a plethora of developmental writing activities, including word processing and a keyboarding skills program. All program objectives were met, with the target group improving in all areas. Appendices include various work sheets, activities, and samples of students' writings.

Authorship Statement/Document Release

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I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

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CHAPTER I

Purpose

The setting for this practicum was a middle sized elementary school in a large, culturally diverse metropolitan area. The surrounding community is well kept and is mostly constructed of attached townhouses--two bedrooms, one bath--which were designed as "beginning homes" for young families. However, in recent years there has been considerable migration from countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Columbia, Chile, and Puerto Rico. As a result, many of these townhouses are inhabited by multiple family groups. Though most of the children speak English with some degree of proficiency, very few of their parents or relatives do.

This school's assigned program capacity is 879 students and the school typically enrolls 860-880 students, thus running slightly under capacity in most years. This is significant because most of the schools in the surrounding locale are from 150% to 191% of capacity. The student population is composed of 72% Hispanic, 23% White Hon-Hispanic, 2% Black Non-Hispanic, and 2% Asian children. As of 1994, 45% were on free or reduced lunch. In addition , 17% of the

children were being served in classes for limited English Proficiency. The students are generally well behaved, with only 1.5% (13 children) receiving indoor or outdoor suspension.

Due to the Hispanic influence in the school, almost all of the employees speak Spanish and English. Some employees in support positions, such as custodians and cafeteria personnel, speak only Spanish. The staff consists of a principal, 1 assistant principal, 38 regular teachers (including physical education, music, art, and comet lab). There are also 2 exceptional education teachers, 1 librarian, 1 counselor, and 2 aides. There is a standard configuration of office staff for an elementary school: 1 secretary; 1 attendance clerk; 1 data input person; and a "systems" aide. Though this school is not managed in the School Based/Shared Decision mode, the principal wields a "light touch" over the teaching faculty. He allows each grade to experiment and develop units, themes, and projects which are appropriate to the needs of their students and their teaching styles. This school is striving to incorporate the newer methods of Whole Language instruction and exploratory mathematics and science, as required by the new Competency-Based Curriculum.

The plant is especially well designed for the convenience of the students and teachers. Each four-pack block building houses a grade level. With few exceptions, there are four teachers per grade level. Besides a large teaching area, each class has a computer, two complete walls of windows, individual air conditioning controls, and a vanity style sink with storage. Each of the four teachers has their own ample storage area. There are also two work rooms--each to be shared by two teachers, and all four rooms interconnect. The four-pack also has a custodial closet, a bathroom, and an "inner room" where students can do special projects, but still be supervised by all four teachers while the regular activities continue.

The researcher is a fourth grade teacher, pursuing a Master's Degree in Elementary Education, whose responsibilities include instruction in language arts, math, social studies, and science, and orchestrating the management details of children who flow through ten variations of schedules on any given school day. Thoughout 27 years of teaching in kindergarten through fifth grade, including music, math remediation, and Reading Reentry (a one-on-one tutorial program for high-risk first graders), there have been many diverse students. Twenty four years were

spent in two Chapter I schools, and the remaining time in the research setting. Over time there have been major shifts in curriculum philosophy requiring adjustments of instructional techniques.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The main thrust of fourth grade is the improvement of students' writing achievement since the State Writing Assessment Test has been instituted. The test uses a 0-6 point rubric (Appendix A:p.38). As a result of the state test, writing is now also a priority at the county level. Each written response is read by two "human evaluators" and the scores are averaged. Theoretically, all fourth graders should be able to score between a 2.5 and a 4.0 on the test. Higher scores would indicate unusual talent in writing. However, at the practicum setting, the school average was 2.1 in 1994. This composite score included regular education students, gifted students, and those exited from E.S.O.L. The ESE students did not participate in the testing. There was a discrepancy between this average and the minimum acceptable score. Due to the small range of points on the rubric, and the averaging of scores, a .5 to 1.0 improvement was the goal for an individual student (*Florida Writes*).

That measurable improvement would be the anticipated goal from the beginning of fourth grade in September, to the actual test, which would be at the end of January. For this project, fourth grade students were administered a writing pre-test (Appendix B:p.40) to determine their level of written communication skills, using the rubric that had been designed by the State Writing Test. By assessing the scores of the targeted students (Appendix F:p.48) and comparing them to the expectations of the writing rubric (Appendix A:p.38), it was apparent that these fourth grade students were not very proficient in either grammar or their ability to write to a prompt and stay on a topic. Most students were unable to formulate a coherent paragraph, or organize a topic with minimal spelling and convention errors. Their writings tended to be disorganized and contained much unrelated information. Besides that, many disliked writing because it had been a difficult chore to edit their own works. By insisting that every word was spelled correctly (without the help of a computer Spell Check), and by placing too much emphasis on the quality of students' handwriting, instead of their thoughts, writing became a burdensome task.

The fifteen targeted fourth grade students who were included in this study had scores on a writing pre-test that were below 2.5 and Reading Comprehension scores which were below average, stanines 1-4, (Appendix F:p.48). This was a discrepancy because the students were not succeeding within the expected norm. These students were the ones who were not writing adequately, as shown by their pre-test scores.

A Student Survey (Appendix D:p.44) was included to ascertain if negative feelings about writing interfered with the writing process. To further define the target group, gender was included to determine if that had any influence on the results (Appendix F:p.48). The design of the "Student Survey" strove to clarify if the students enjoyed writing and if they felt there were certain skills, such as grammar and spelling, that were particularly difficult. The other important areas included the concepts that "It's hard to get ideas on paper", and whether or not pre-writing was being utilized.

Most students did not express frustration with Spelling or Grammar (Appendix D:p.44). Question #1, "Writing is fun.": 57% agreed. Question #6, "Grammar is hard for me." : 57% disagreed. In response to Question #7, "I have ideas I can't write down.": 61%

disagreed. In reference to pre-writing, Question #10, 61% agreed that it was useful. Finally, in surveying computer usage, Question #8, "It's easy writing on a computer,"; 65% agreed and in Question #9, "It's easy to type the right keys.": 48% agreed. Thus it appeared that the students generally agreed writing was enjoyable and they did not feel hampered by the lack of writing tools or by using a computer.

The two questions which appeared to be the most significant were #2 & #3, which dealt with understanding Expository and Narrative forms. These specific styles were required on the State Writing Assessment. In response to #2, "I understand the expository form.", and #3, "I understand the narrative form.", 57% and 74% disagreed, respectively. This impacted the students' scores.

Another factor was that many students spoke a different language at home than the one in which instruction was given and the one in which they would take the writing test (English). Home language or first language of the students was considered. (Appendix F:p.48). Home language was defined as the "language currently spoken at home" and first language was defined as the "first language a child spoke". This may or may not have been significant since

students must have been exited from "English for Speakers of Other Languages" to participate in the writing assessment. The practice writings were carefully monitored to see if there was a residual effect or "language lag" for those in the above categories.

In conclusion, the problem to be addressed was that the writing scores were below the expected level of 2.5 to 4.0 and that the targeted students lacked knowledge about expository and narrative writing styles. Also, as shown by a typing pre-test in the computer lab, they had limited keyboard skills (Appendix F:p.48). Finally, enhancement of the students' attitudes concerning the writing process could improve their writings by the awareness that writing could be a pleasure, not a chore.

OUTCOME OBJECTIVES

Given these facts, the realizable goal for a 12 week intervention program was a 0.5 to 1.0 increase in writing scores. The proposed outcome objectives for this discrepancy were:

OBJECTIVE #1:

During the twelve week implementation period, 80% of the target group will increase their writing scores by a minimum of 0.5 to 1.0 points as measured by a teacher made post-test.

OBJECTIVE #2:

During the twelve week implementation period, 80% of the target group will increase their understanding of the Expository and Narrative forms by responding "AGREE" to questions #2 & #3 as measured by the teacher made Student Survey (Appendices D:p.44 and E:p.46).

OBJECTIVE #3:

During the twelve week implementation period, 80% of the target group will increase their typing and keyboard ability by a minimum of 20% as measured by the evaluation section of *Communikeys*--an Apple computer software program.

In conclusion, the problem of improving the written communication skills of students was addressed by employing multiple strategies and various mediums. The students participated in a "writing intense" setting for 12 weeks. Anticipated, was measurable gain of the students' writing scores on a post-test, in

the expected range. Knowledge of the mechanical skills, such as the narrative and expository writing modes were developed. And finally, there were affective gains in students' feelings about the writing process as well as improvement in keyboarding skills. The project was intended to enhance their ability to communicate.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategies

Enabling fourth grade students to write proficiently in various modes--narrative, expository, and more free-flowing styles--required many diverse procedures. Many articles were available concerning the development of quality student writings. They included a focus on the writing process, techniques of improving students' writing skills, and the use of computers to enhance motivation. Writing has become a particular focus in fourth grade since the State of Florida instituted the Writing Assessment.

To begin, there was information concerning classrooms which were "print rich" with books, magazines, and reference materials. There was also an emphasis placed on providing large blocks of time to enable students to develop their thoughts and edit their own writings. Further, the need for specific instruction in the writing process and in various forms of writings was discussed. Finally, there were articles discussing the motivational facet of computers with children. Some authors concentrated on the quality of writings done on a computer, while others discussed the quantity factor.

Flood (1993) discussed the development of a "writer-centered" classroom. In such an environment the pupils were led through the writing process: Writing; Rewriting; Editing; and Publishing. However this article stressed that writing did not always progress in such an orderly fashion. It was not a recipe to be followed. Writing was a cognitively demanding, complex, multifaceted task. This classroom contained a multitude of materials, including books, articles and various references. In a "writer-centered" class, students found many resources to enrich their writing vocabulary. Also, students were allowed to select their own topics, had varying times for the tasks, and were given instruction as needed. Students were encouraged to be aware of their reading audience and to confer with their peers in the editing phase.

Reading and writing should be brought together around all curriculum in an elementary school, according to Robinson (1994). Students who engaged in reading and writing activities came to value literacy and the effort it took to become confident writers (Robinson, 1994). The author stressed the importance of using all kinds of literacy skills, including letter writing, in order to improve students' writing.

The schools we have versus the schools we need were discussed by Allington (1994). The time had come to reject

the notion that only a few children could learn to read and write well. Instead, the author emphasized that there must be a substantial expanding of the opportunities for all students to read, write, and to listen to stories. Low experience children were immersed in print texts. Students needed to have access to high-quality instruction. "The impetus of change lies in the recognition that children need time to read and write. Current programs are often designed in ways that literally reduce such opportunities" (Robinson, 1994, p.174). Children needed demonstration models and teachers who talked about the mental activities that occurred during the writing process.

Don't rush children to write was the opinion of Harwayne (1992). Harwayne first discussed the natural process of language development: Children first listen; then understand; next speak; and finally read and write. Children had to have time and a place to practice writing. They were encouraged to carry a notebook with them at all times. This "writer's notebook" was a place to collect bits and pieces of their lives and a place to jot down their thoughts. The notebook gave them a distinct advantage when doing formal writing.

The importance of letting children write about what mattered to them was O'Connor's view (1993). O'Connor called this "memory book" writing. The students could

access different kinds of memories. Students chose their topics and decided which drafts to edit for publishing. This provided them ownership of their writings.

In summary, the above authors all stressed the importance of adequate time for writing. They seemed to agree that students needed a class environment with multiple printed sources, and multiple opportunities for writing. The steps would be individualized. The students must be allowed to develop at their own pace.

The next phase of the research centered on the specifics needed for quality writing instruction. Scaffolding strategies were a means of helping students understand text features (Lewis, 1994). The scaffolding forms included expository and narrative paragraph frames, pictorial forms used as a bridge to writing. The expository frame helped children of all ranges of abilities become familiar with non-fiction writing. These frames gave the children a strategy while enabling them to achieve success at writing--a vital ingredient in improving student motivation.

By setting up meaningful guidelines the production of writing was enhanced (Avery, 1993). Avery used the term "workshop" for writing instruction. Many different activities occurred simultaneously. The students were given specific formats that helped them develop particular styles

of writing. Some were paragraph frames, and teacher modeling. Also stressed was the need for vivid verbs, varied sentence structures, and use of synonyms. From "Florida Writes" (1994, p.9 & 10), guidelines for the fourth grade test were given. Included was the writing rubric (Appendix A:p38). Effective writing was defined as being focused on the topic and being organized. This enabled the readers to follow the flow of ideas. Quality writing contained supporting ideas that were developed through the use of details, examples, and vivid language. The sentences were to be varied and to follow the conventions of standard English. Students must be engaged in the writing process, have frequent opportunities to write, and begin this in kindergarten.

To summarize this phase of the research, it was apparent that students must have quality instruction in writing formats and conventions. Having time to write is again mentioned. Writing must be begun in kindergarten, not left to the fourth grade teachers in preparation for the writing assessment.

The final area of research was on the use of computers (word processors) in writing. When you mix kids and computers, great things happen according to Stonesifer (1994). Stonesifer also stated that there were studies that showed that children's motivation to learn and self-esteem

was improved through computer usage. There was a natural attraction of children to computers. Computers also gave access to libraries, timely information and other learning resources through various "on line" programs. In a study of word processing and students' writings, Harwisher (1986), found that there were substantial differences in the quantity of writing, but not in the quality of students' revisions. This author concluded that a computer was not the variable that influenced success in writing, but rather a student motivator. The quality of instruction seemed to be the definitive variable.

However, computers provided on an individual basis, highly sequenced, strategy-based instruction (Dailey, 1994). The computer was also cited as being uniquely suited to teach "inefficient learners", including those with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), due to its ability to provide immediate feed-back, repetition, prompts, and guiding questions. The computer helped students focus on their tasks and did not require a "wait time" for teachers' attention. Students who worked with a computer had the computer's complete attention. The students could progress at their own pace. And, the computer was patient. It didn't mind repeating itself!

Students who were normally unmotivated writers would spend extended time on a computer (Solomon, 1994). Solomon

observed that student writings went from 2 to 3 sentences, to 2 to 3 paragraphs through computer usage. The students were more careful with their writings and ideas. Through observation, the author saw improvement in writing quality and students' attitudes.

Deshler (1984), reported a growing database documenting that many inefficient learners, including students with ADD, could be taught to become more self-regulated learners, through computer usage. Deshler and his colleagues developed highly sequenced strategy-based instructional packages to improve reading comprehension, and writing of sentences and paragraphs. This also provided students with built-in error monitoring. Strategy instruction was successful with students who were not responding appropriately (Swanson, 1989). Through computer usage the students became actively involved in their learning. This controlled practice included prompts, guiding questions, immediate feed-back, and repetition.

The last consideration here concerned the cost of computers in schools (Wood, 1993). Wood discussed the need to analyze the effectiveness of computers versus the cost. He concluded that computers proved to be very cost efficient. Computers were not consumable and required minimal maintenance. The only real cost was the special paper to print students' works.

To summarize the articles on computers, the authors all had positive views about the use of computers to assist students. Computers appeared to hold a natural attraction for students and provided a motivating factor, especially with the use of word processing in writing. Computers were patient and provided immediate feed-back.

From Lapp, a "writer-centered" classroom was developed and the concept of a "writer's notebook" was incorporated into the daily routine. From Harwayne, Allington, and Robinson, large time blocks for writing practice were scheduled, and the students were immersed in a plethora of writing activities. From O'Connor, the philosophy of ownership of writings by the students emerged. This position enabled students to simply enjoy writing. From Lewis, Avery, and "Florida Writes", highly structured instruction in the use of scaffolding models, conventions of English, and use of synonyms, vivid verbs, and varied sentences was employed. Also, the importance of focus and structure was stressed as students responded to practice prompts. These enhanced the quality of the students' writings.

Finally, from Stonesifer, Harwisher, Dailey, Deshler, Solomon, Swanson, and Wood, word processing was utilized by the students in practice sessions. To ease the typing process, keyboarding skills were also developed.

Computers were found to be very motivating. They also provided immediate feed-back.

In conclusion, this researcher used a philosophical approach to entice children to write. The structured instruction developed the quality of writing. And, computers motivated students. Combined, these strategies improved the scores in fourth grade on the Florida Writing Assessment.

CHAPTER III

Method

The targeted fourth grade students were immersed in a 12 week "writer's workshop." The activities included a teacher-made writing post test (Appendix C:p.42), the use of computers for word processing, keeping "writer's notebooks", student journals, portfolios, and a mini-seminar featuring a local Florida International University instructor. The one on-going strategy was an hour of computer time each week in the school lab. Since there were 25 computers, there was one for each student. This time included 20 minutes per week devoted to *Communikeys*-a software program that taught keyboard skills. The students took a typing pre-test (Appendix F:p.48) in the first week and a post-test (Appendix G:p.50) in the twelfth week. The software was designed so that the computer scored and timed the results. In the remaining 40 minutes of lab time students used the word processing software called *Apple Works* to write and print their stories.

Students journaled daily (Appendix K:p.68), and were required to keep a jotter's, or writer's,

notebook. It was carried everywhere so the students could jot down interesting events as they occurred. This provided ideas and details, especially for narrative writing. The remaining activities were implemented on a week-by-week basis.

WEEK #1:

During the first week of implementation the students were introduced to a "World of Writing." They were invited to travel on a journey that would enhance their writing skills. To ensure their co-operation, an overview of the program and the goals were carefully explained to them. Students "signed on" by choosing a simile of themselves on a computer generated picture to be incorporated into the bulletin board for the "World of Writing" (Appendix J:p.57). The students received blue portfolios in which to collect their writings. A parent letter was sent home so they, too, would be advised of the writing goals for their children (Appendix I:p.55). This was also the week when the typing pre-test was administered in the computer lab.

WEEK #2:

The main emphasis of week 2 was writing in the Narrative Form--the story form--stressing the need for

a beginning, a middle, and an ending. The students used a story map as a frame (Appendix L:p.74). Imaginative writing was encouraged through student collaboration groups (Appendix J:p.62). Another narrative project was the three color symmetrical paintings. Students put several dots of paint on manila paper, folded and rubbed the paper, then opened it up. This produced identical shapes on each side of the paper (Appendix R:p.99). They wrote about whatever they "saw" there, as long as no one called them butterflies!

WEEK #3:

By using Expository prompts, the students practiced "Explaining". Its form has four parts--a topic or main idea paragraph, a "detail" paragraph, the "best detail" paragraph, and a "conclusion" paragraph (Appendix M:p.77). This four-part scaffold assisted students in writing expository pieces. The worksheet called "Explaining" (Appendix J:p.61) gave the students a way to begin to tackle this writing style. The pieces titled "World of Writing" show samples of their efforts to utilize expository techniques (Appendix S:p.109).

WEEK #4:

The students used varying sentences such as interrogative, exclamatory, and complex. These were incorporated into their writing to add variation. This increased the readability of the pieces. However, many of them struggled to rid the beginning of every sentence with "And". This was a difficult skill.

WEEK #5:

The students developed dialogues to incorporate into their narrative writings. The use of quotation marks and "asking" dialogue was stressed (Appendix J:p.65).

The children's natural humor became apparent when their characters were talking. (See: Attachments; Student Folder)

WEEK #6 and WEEK #7:

By the sixth week, students had an overview of the writing forms. It was now time to enhance and enrich vocabulary. During weeks six and seven the instruction focused on vivid verbs and "Kill the word" -- i.e. words such as "nice" or "big" were replaced by "incredible" or "enormous." Alternate synonyms and antonyms were explored through brainstorming and a

thesaurus. Class charts were developed (See: Attachments; Pictures), and a variety of worksheets provided the students visual examples to help develop vivid vocabulary (Appendix J:p.63).

WEEK #8:

Writing across the curriculum was a component of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Students wrote with prompts that included science, math, and social studies (Appendices O:p.81, P:p.91, Q:p.96). This not only enhanced their expository skills but impacted them with the reality that writing is for every subject, not just language arts.

WEEK #9:

Students selected two or three favorite writings and edited and published these. They illustrated the stories, used magazine pictures, or incorporated graphs and charts, as appropriate. These were bound by the school's binding machine or placed in plastic folders, as they chose (See: Attachment; Student Folder).

WEEK #10:

An instructor from Florida International University, who specializes in students' writing workshops, was invited to present a program to the

children (See: Attachments; Pictures). The students had prepared questions about writing, and about their portfolios, to discuss with the presenter. This specialist stressed the writing process and the importance of the "writer's notebook." The students utilized the "Listener/Author" form (Appendix N:p.79), and expanded their notes to include the five senses. This magnified their writings and gave them another criteria by which to improve the quality of their finished pieces.

WEEK #11:

The students wrote two pages describing the events of the past ten weeks. They discussed their struggles and successes (Appendix S:p.109). They had an opportunity to visit other classrooms and share what they had learned with other third and fourth graders. Each student selected a teacher, wrote a letter on our class "stationary" (Appendix J:p.59) explaining what the class had been doing, and asked permission to share a story. They scheduled appointments for times to visit. That was an exciting day, as students practiced reading out loud to each other to be ready to read in the other classrooms!

WEEK #12:

During the last week of the practicum the students took the teacher made writing post-test, the typing post-test, and the Student Survey post-response (Appendix E:p.46). They completed their portfolios and organized their writings. The "World of Writing" frame was added (Appendix J:p.57), so that each child could paste a photograph on it. Now the student folders were truly individualized. The portfolios were decorated to show what they liked the best about the writing program. And, finally, their parents were invited to share in a "writer's feast" as they enjoyed a variety of treats (See: Attachments; Pictures). There were many smiles that day!

CHAPTER IV

Results

The evaluation instruments that were used during the implementation of this practicum included the teacher made post-test in writing, which consisted of a three part prompt (Appendix C:p.42), the teacher made post-test student survey (Appendix E:p.46), and the computer post-test in typing (Appendix G:p.50). It measured the words per minute that each student could accurately type. This information was part of the software, *Communikeys,* an Apple product.

The success criteria for Objective #1 was an 80% increase by the targeted fifteen students in their writing scores, by a minimum of 0.5 points. The guidelines for these scores were obtained from the State Writing Test rubric (Appendix A:p.38). Thirteen of the fifteen students achieved the desired improvement, for an 87% improvement rate (Appendix G:p.50). The success criteria for objective #1 was met.

The success criteria for Objective #2 was that 80% of the target group would increase their understanding of the Expository and Narrative forms by responding "AGREE" to questions #2 & #3, as measured by the

teacher made post student survey (Appendix E:p.46). The percentage of students who understood the Expository Form of writing improved by 43 percentage points which was a 98% improvement rate. The percentage of students who understood the Narrative Form of writing improved by 61 percentage points which was a 235% improvement rate. For both question #2 and #3, 13 of 15 students responded "AGREE", giving a total of 87% positive responses (Appendices D:p.44 & E:p.46). The success criteria for objective #2 was met.

The success criteria for objective #3 was that 80% of the target group would increase their typing and keyboard skills by a minimum of 20%. Fifteen of fifteen students improved their scores, for a 100% rate, with an average speed of 16.4 words per minute. This computes to a change of 10.87 words per minute, from an average of 5.53 words per minute--a 197% increase (Appendices F:p.48 & G:p.50). The success criteria for objective #3 was met.

In reviewing the results of the students' writing scores, the mean--2.27, the mode--2.00, the median--2.00, remained below the optium range for fourth graders. According to *Florida Writes,* these should be between 2.5 and 4.0. Though the success criteria (improvement of 0.5 to 1.0 points) was met, these

students would still benefit from continued intense writing instruction. Ten of the targeted fifteen students were children who spoke a language other than English, and whose home language was not primarily English (Appendix F:p.48). Many had relatives who spoke to them in other languages, so they alternated their communicating language. Confusions of modifying words became apparent when expressions such as, "The eyes of the boy red.", instead of "The boy's eyes are red.", were found in their writings. In "Turtle",(Appendix O:p.87), there is the statement, "In the old days babies turtle head for the water..." In Spanish, this formation is correct, but it is not correct for proper English usage. All of the targeted students had been exited from E.S.O.L., but that score was based primarily on their oral language abilities. More instruction in written expression must be provided.

The typing skills of the students improved drastically. The first week of computer lab, they complained loudly that typing was hard and they made multiple mistakes. Some of the early papers were almost unreadable! However, by the end of the twelve weeks, most of the typed pieces contained few major typing errors. They often worked in twos on the

classroom computer to read, type, and help each other edit their works before they were printed. By re-reading the monitor, many errors were corrected.

However, the word processing software, *Appleworks,* was not user-friendly. It was developed before the common use of hard drives for personal computers, and the convenience of modern perks, such as *Windows* and a "mouse." *Appleworks* required continuous disk changes, and most of the options did not work. *Verify,* the spell checking device in this program, had few pre-programmed words, which made it unusable. Other options, such as the ability to double space writings before they were printed, worked only occasionally. In fact, it would sometimes double space only a part of a paper. This problem occurred throughout the students' writings. Initially, the software *Magic Slate* was to be used for this project. However, the school computer network had been reprogrammed and *Magic Slate* was removed from the menu. This software was not available at the site. *Appleworks* was supposed to be an improved word processing program for children, but it proved to be frustrating to use.

Communikeys, a typing skills software program, proved to be very effective in improving keyboarding

skills. The original program, *Typing Tutor*, had also been removed from the network during the reprogramming. *Communikeys* provided simple instructions, and much repetitive practice for the students. By requiring that the students use both hands for typing they gained a functional skill.

Within a normal school setting, schedules were adjusted to accommodate the needs of the emerging writers. With little intrusion into the daily routine of students, writing became an integral part of every subject and every project. The computers were exciting for the students to use, and will become a life-long, real life skill necessary for adult employment. Their communication skills were enhanced, as was their awareness of the need to be able to communicate their thoughts in a coherent manner. The solution to the problem posed in this practicum was soundly based on the research and found to be as successful as the studies cited.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

This implementation plan has proven to be an effective tool in improving writing scores and the writing quality of fourth graders. This approach can be successful for all children. The strategies developed here should be continued with each new fourth grade class. In addition, there needs to be articulation with the third grade teachers so they can begin to prepare their students for the required writing test in fourth grade. In fact, emergent writing skills must be encouraged as early as Kindergarten.

Within a school setting the faculty and staff can be informed through "Mini-Workshops". Several facets should be explored, including writing forms (expository, narrative, and persuasive, for older students), the use of prompts to encourage writers to write to a topic, and the importance of writing in a focused manner. DEW (Drop Everything and Write) should be instituted at least once a week for 30 minutes. The whole school needs to participate, including teachers, administrators, and the office staff. Children need to see adults modeling the writing process, and they

should share with each other. Those in the feeder-pattern should also be encouraged to participate in "brain-storming" sessions to disseminate this information to other teachers in the area.

Writing is one of the main thrusts of the Competency-Based Curriculum now in use by the school system in which this project was implemented. There are many opportunities for school-wide writing, including such diverse activities as Red Ribbon Week (substance abuse prevention) and writing letters to Santa. Through an across the curriculum approach, students should be utilizing their writing skills in all subject areas. Quality pieces can be highlighted by closed circuit television, as children read their original works, or through assembly programs. Parents need to be invited to workshops where they learn not only about writing modes, but also about the importance of their children's efforts. Effective communication is a life long skill.

Outside resources should be explored to show students the writing in the World of Work. Field trips, guest speakers, and local authors need to be emphasized. Students need to come to the realization that even in a technological age it's still humans who

do the thinking and that computers only process the mechanical information.

Finally, by re-writing this practicum into a short article form, it could be submitted for publication to a professional journal such as *The Reading Teacher*. To fund further usage of this writing project, applications should be made for an Impact II grant, worth several hundred dollars, or to Citicorp, which provides nationwide grants worth several thousand dollars. These funds would facilitate the purchase of new software, paper, and even modern hardware that would include the use of a fax and modem. As a result of this project, the need for an up-to-date Writing Lab became apparent. Students need opportunities to write and type on high-tech computers. This equipment would also provide research opportunities far beyond the usual classroom references through on-line systems.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Florida Writing Assessment Rubric

Florida Writing Assessment
Grade 4

STUDENT REPORT

TYPE OF WRITING TESTED:

Description of Writing Scores

A paper scored 6 is a well-planned response to the assigned topic. The writer's choice of words and use of different types of sentence structures clearly and vividly communicate ideas. With few exceptions, spelling and punctuation conventions are used correctly.

A paper scored 5.5 was scored 5 by one reader and 6 by a second reader.

A paper scored 5 is an organized response that may occasionally drift away from the assigned topic. Words and sentences effectively communicate the writer's ideas. Spelling and punctuation conventions are generally used correctly.

A paper scored 4.5 was scored 4 by one reader and 5 by a second reader.

A paper scored 4 is a generally organized response that may include information that is extraneous to the assigned topic. Words and sentences adequately communicate the writer's ideas, although some ideas could be explained more thoroughly. Spelling and punctuation conventions are generally used correctly.

A paper scored 3.5 was scored 3 by one reader and 4 by a second reader.

A paper scored 3 has some organization but may include information that is unrelated to the assigned topic. Ideas that help communicate the writer's thoughts could be expressed more clearly. Some spelling and punctuation conventions are used incorrectly.

A paper scored 2.5 was scored 2 by one reader and 3 by a second reader.

A paper scored 2 may only slightly address the assigned topic and may include unrelated information. Words and sentences express the writer's thoughts in a limited way. The paper may contain many spelling and punctuation errors.

A paper scored 1.5 was scored 1 by one reader and 2 by a second reader.

A paper scored 1 is an unorganized response that minimally addresses the requirements of the topic (explaining for expository and telling a story for narrative). Words and sentences do not express ideas clearly. The sentences may be incomplete and may contain many spelling and punctuation errors.

A paper scored U has a response not related to the assigned topic, cannot be read, or does not contain a response.

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Appendix B: Writing Pre-Test

Appendix B: Writing Pre-Test

School is not the only place where we learn things, and teachers are not the only people we learn things from.

Remember a time when you learned something from a friend.

Tell about the time you learned something from a friend so that your reader knows exactly what happened.

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Appendix C: Writing Post-Test

Appendix C: Writing Post-Test

Many people think that being one age is better than being any other age.

If you could choose to be any age (including your own age right now), how old would you like to be?

Write to explain to your reader what you think life would be like for you at that age.

Appendix D: Pre-Test Student Survey

Appendix D: Pre-Test Student Survey

STUDENT SURVEY

	AGREE	DON'T KNOW	DIS-AGREE
1) Writing is fun.	13	1	9
2) I understand Expository form.	10	11	2
3) I understand Narrative form.	6	11	6
4) It's important for me to improve.	19	1	3
5) Spelling is hard for me.	3	1	19
6) Grammar is hard for me.	5	5	13
7) I have ideas I can't write.	4	5	14
8) It's easy writing on a Computer.	15	3	5
9) It's easy to type the right keys.	11	3	9
10) Pre-Writing helps me organize.	14	8	1

EXTRA COMMENTS:

There were 23 students who responded to this survey. The empirical numbers shown in the table translate to the following percentages:

1 = 4%	6 = 26%	13 = 57%
2 = 9%	8 = 35%	14 = 61%
3 = 13%	9 = 39%	15 = 65%
4 = 17%	10 = 43%	17 = 74%
5 = 22%	11 = 48%	19 = 83%

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Appendix E: Post-Test Student Survey

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Appendix E: Post-Test Student Survey

	AGREE	DON'T KNOW	DIS-AGREE
1) Writing is fun.	11	1	3
2) I understand Expositary form.	13	2	0
3) I understand Narrative form.	13	2	0
4) It's important for me to improve.	13	1	1
5) Spelling is hard for me.	1	1	13
6) Grammar is hard for me.	2	4	9
7) I have ideas I can't write.	4	1	10
8) It's easy writing on a Computer.	13	0	2
9) It's easy to type the right keys.	12	0	3
10) Pre-Writing helps me organize.	11	2	2

EXTRA COMMENTS:

There were 15 students who responded to this survey. The empirical numbers shown in the table translate to the following percentages:

1 = 7%	4 = 26%	11 = 73%
2 = 13%	9 = 60%	12 = 80%
3 = 20%	10 = 67%	13 = 87%

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Appendix F: Pre-Test Matrix

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Appendix F: Pre-Test Matrix

STUDENT #	STANINES Reading Comprehension	STANINES Total Reading	WRITING Pre-Test Score	TYPING Words per minute Pre-Test Score	RESPONSE Appendix C #2	RESPONSE Appendix C #3	GENDER	First or Home Language
1	3	3	1	10	Don't know	Don't know	M	Spanish
2	NA	NA	*U	5	Don't know	Dis-agree	M	Spanish
3	4	4	*U	2	Don't know	Don't know	M	English
4	3	2	*U	6	Dis-agree	Don't know	M	Arabic
5	3	3	2	6	Don't know	Don't know	M	Portuguese
6	4	3	1	9	Don't know	Dis-agree	F	English
7	4	5	1	5	Don't know	Don't know	M	English
8	4	4	1	3	Don't know	Don't know	M	Spanish
9	4	4	2	5	Agree	Dis-agree	F	Spanish
10	4	4	2	5	Agree	Agree	F	Spanish
11	2	3	*U	5	Don't know	Dis-agree	M	English
12	1	2	*U	5	Dis-agree	Dis-agree	M	English
13	NA	NA	1	3	Don't know	Don't know	F	Spanish
14	4	4	*U	9	Don't know	Don't know	F	Spanish
15	4	4	2	5	Don't know	Dis-agree	F	Spanish

*U = zero points

Communikeys Software

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Appendix G: Post-Test Matrix

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Appendix G: Post-Test Matrix

STUDENT #	STANINES Reading Comprehension	STANINES Total Reading	WRITING POST-Test Score	TYPING Words per minute POST-Test Score	RESPONSE Appendix E #2	RESPONSE Appendix E #3	GENDER	First or Home Language
1	3	3	3	35	Agree	Agree	M	Spanish
2	NA	NA	1	23	Agree	Agree	M	Spanish
3	4	4	2	6	Agree	Don't know	M	English
4	3	2	3	22	Agree	Agree	M	Arabic
5	3	3	2	19	Agree	Agree	M	Portuguese
6	4	3	2	17	Agree	Agree	F	English
7	4	5	2	10	Agree	Agree	M	English
8	4	4	3	10	Don't know	Don't know	M	Spanish
9	4	4	3	20	Agree	Agree	F	Spanish
10	4	4	3	19	Don't know	Agree	F	Spanish
11	2	3	2	7	Agree	Agree	M	English
12	1	2	2	13	Agree	Agree	M	English
13	NA	NA	1	9	Agree	Agree	F	Spanish
14	4	4	2	19	Agree	Agree	F	Spanish
15	4	4	3	17	Agree	Agree	F	Spanish

Communikeys Software

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Appendix H: Empirical Data Results

Appendix H: Empirical Data Results

EMPIRICAL DATA RESULTS

I. WRITING SCORES

PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	AVERAGE IMPROVEMENT
Mean - .87	Mean - 2.27	1.62 points
Mode - U	Mode - 2.00	
Median - 1.00	Median - 2.00	

OBJECTIVE #1 - Improve students' writing scores by a minimum of .5 point.

13 of 15 students improved their scores by .5 point or more. 13 of 15 = 87% of the students met or exceeded the objective.

II. STUDENT SURVEY

	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST
Question: # 1 -	57% agreed	73% agreed
# 2 -	**44% agreed**	**87% agreed**
# 3 -	**26% agreed**	**87% agreed**
# 4 -	83% agreed	87% agreed
# 5 -	83% disagreed	87% disagreed
# 6 -	57% disagreed	60% disagreed
# 7 -	61% disagreed	67% disagreed
# 8 -	65% agreed	87% agreed
# 9 -	48% agreed	80% agreed
#10 -	61% agreed	61% agreed

OBJECTIVE #2 - Improve students' understanding of Expository Form of writing (question #2) and Narrative Form of writing (question #3).

The percentage of students who understood the Expository Form of writing improved by 98%.

The percentage of students who understood the Narrative Form of writing improved by 235%.

Appendix H: Empirical Data Results Continued

III. **TYPING SCORES** - Words per minute

PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	AVERAGE-IMPROVEMENT
Mean - 5.53	Mean - 16.4	197% (10.87 WPM)
Mode - 5.00	Mode - 19.0	
Median- 5.00	Median- 17.0	

OBJECTIVE #3 - Improve students' typing skills by a minimum of 20%.

15 of 15 students improved their typing skills by 20% or more. 15 of 15 = 100% of the students met or exceeded the objective.

Appendix I: Parent Information Letter

Appendix I: Parent Information Letter

03-15-95 Bent Tree Elementary School 221-0461

Dear Parents,

We are embarking on a journey to the 'WORLD OF WRITING." Your child will have a chance to improve writing skills, use a word processing program (Apple Works), and practice typing skills (Commikeys).

We plan to spend an hour a week in the computer lab, as well as use our classroom computer to write our stories and class assignments. We will study the Narrative and Expository forms of writing, synonyms, antonyms, and dialogues. These will be incorporated into a variety of projects during the next 12 weeks.

Your child has received a "Jotter's Notepad" to record interesting facts that can be used in various writings. This should be carried at all times so that interesting sights and experiences can be "jotted down" as they occur. This will be a base for ideas during writing activities.

In June, we will invite you to come and read our stories and listen to us read them to you. We are planning to have a "Writer's Feast" where you can enjoy a snack. This will culminate a very busy fourth-grade year.

Sincerely,

(Mrs.)N.B.Priest

Appendix J: Computer Generated Forms

Appendix J: Computer Generated Forms

World of Writing

Week #1
March 15
OVERVIEW

Week #2
March 22
NARRATIVE

Week #3
March 29
EXPOSITORY

Week #4
April 12
SENTENCES

Week #5
April 19
DIALOGUES

Week #6
April 26
KILL THE WORD

Week #7
May 3
SYNONYMS
ANTONYMS

Week #8
May 10
ACROSS
CURRICULUM

Week #9
May 17
PUBLISH

Week #10
May 24
WRITER'S
WORKSHOP

Week #11
May 31
SHARING

Week #12
June 7
POST-
TEST

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Our World of Writing

Appendix J: Computer Generated Forms

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Class Stationary

Appendix J: Computer Generated Forms

THE ABC's of EXPLAINING

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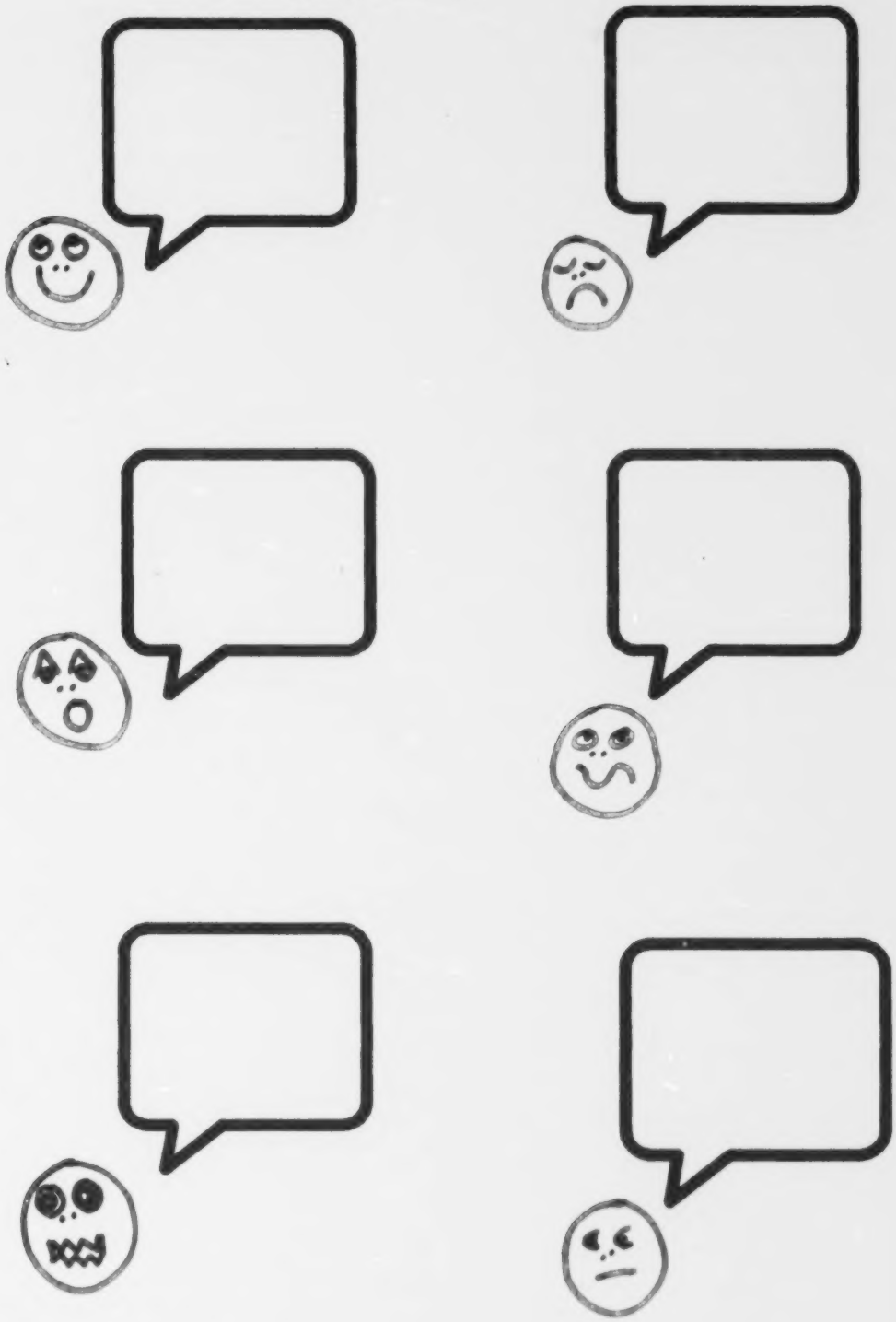
DIALOGUE WORKSHEET - #1

Appendix J: Computer Generated Forms

DIALOGUE, #2



What are these CREATURES saying?

Appendix K: Journal Topics

Appendix K: Journal Topics

JOURNAL TOPICS

1. Who is a hero of yours? Why?
2. What is the worst part about being sick?
3. Explain why you do or do not like to talk on the telephone.
4. What happened the first time you went swimming?
5. What is your favorite ride at the fair? Why?
6. Describe a time you were bored.
7. Who is your favorite relative? Give reasons for your choice.
8. What do you most enjoy doing with your best friend?
9. List ways your life would be different if you never went to school.
10. Why do you think almost everyone loves Snoopy?
11. How do you feel about young people who use drugs?
12. What do you think is the hardest choice young people have to make?
13. Explain why you do or do not like to play video games.
14. What makes a teacher special?
15. What do you think you could learn from a butterfly?
16. Do you think recycling is important or just a waste of time?
17. Explain why you do or do not believe in UFO's.

Appendix K: Journal Topics

18. How would you improve the food in your school's cafeteria?
19. If you could change your name, what would it be?
20. Write about some disadvantages of being rich.
21. Write about the things that make you feel strong.
22. What makes you feel nervous?
23. Describe how you would look if you were a car.
24. Explain what you like and dislike about your name.
25. What is your favorite holiday? Why?
26. Tell me about your worst fear.
27. What is your favorite color? Tell reasons why.
28. If you had x-ray vision, what would you use it for?
29. What makes you special or unique?
30. Invent the best dessert in the whole world.
31. Explain what you have done in your life to deserve a medal.
32. How do you think you could be a better friend?
33. Write about the kind of parent you think you will be.
34. What do you think is good about television?
35. List the reasons why you think people get divorced.
36. If you were a fish and could talk, what would you say to humans?
37. List the ways you think you can avoid catching a cold.

Appendix K: Journal Topics

38. Explain why you do or do not like math.
39. What makes you most proud to be an American?
40. Tell me something I need to know.
41. Write something you want your classmates to know.
42. Give the President some advice.
43. Write about what is on your mind today -- problems, joys, excitement, happy thoughts, sad thoughts.
44. Draw a picture that expresses how you feel.
45. What do you think about when you taste cotton candy?
46. Describe what you think and feel when you smell cigarette smoke.
47. Express how you feel about doing homework.
48. Reveal a scary dream you have had.
49. What would you do if you were the one who had to make supper today?
50. Give all the reasons you know for being kind to animals.
51. What are the best things about a rainy day?
52. Describe the things you see on your way to school.
53. Tell some things you could do to earn money.
54. Describe the last time you were sick.
55. What was the best vacation you ever had?
56. Tell how you get ready for school each morning.
57. What are the best things about school?

Appendix K: Journal Topics

58. Tell what you think is the worst kind of pollution.
59. Tell about some of the ways you help at home.
60. What would you do if you were the principal of your school?
61. Tell about the best birthday you can remember.
62. What was the best birthday gift you ever *gave*?
63. Reveal the nicest thing anyone ever said about you.
64. Describe one thing that always makes you laugh.
65. What are some things you worry about?
66. What makes you happiest?

Appendix K: Journal Topics

FOR LONGER WRITING

1. Imagine that you had to go to a deserted island for a week. In addition to food, shelter, and other necessities that will be provided, you are allowed to take three personal items. What would they be? Explain the reasons for your choices.

2. Imagine yourself ten years from now. Write down any thoughts, ideas, of mental pictures of yourself that flash across your mind.

Appendix L: Narrative Form

Appendix L: Narrative Form

STORY FRAME

Name:_____ Date:_____

Title:_____

Characters:_____ Setting:_____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

PLOT

Problem:_____

_____

Events:_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Ending._____

_____

_____

Appendix M: Expository Writing Organizers

Appendix M: Expository Writing Organizers

EXPOSITORY WRITING ORGANIZER

B E G I N N I N G

Statement of task:

(Use details, examples, vivid vocabulary to elaborate)

M I D D L E

Support:

(Use details, examples, vivid vocabulary to elaborate)

Support:

(Use details, examples, vivid vocabulary to elaborate)

Most important support:

(Use details, examples, vivid vocabulary to elaborate)

E N D

Restatement of task:

(Use details, examples, vivid vocabulary to elaborate)

Appendix M: Expository Writing Organizers

EASIER EXPOSITORY ORGANIZER

1. What is the TOPIC? "Tell the reader what you are going to write about."

2. DETAILS DETAILS DETAILS DETAILS DETAILS

3. What is the most important detail?

4. CONCLUSION: Restate your topic and close.

Appendix N: Listener/Author Form

Appendix N: Listener/Author Form

Listener_____ Author_____

1. I found the five senses in your Magnified Moment:

   See_____ Taste_____ Touch_____

   Hear_____ Smell_____

2. The part I liked the best was _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Listener_____ Author_____

1. I found the five senses in your Magnified Moment:

   See_____ Taste_____ Touch_____

   Hear_____ Smell_____

2. The part I liked the best was _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix O: Samples - Science

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Appendix O: Samples - Science

SQUIRRELS

Squirrels are in the rodent family. They eat mangos. They run on the phone wires by balancing with their tails. They live in trees.

The squirries cannot be good pets. But they are very friendly. They have brown fur. They have gray and brown furon their tails.

They could jump from wire to tree, and from tree to wire.